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Avian scavengers in Luanda Harbour

by R. K. Brooke

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Erard & Etchécopar (Bull. Brit. Orn. Cl., 1970: 159) note that gulls are chiefly seen in Luanda harbour from December to June, but saw five on 5th October 1969. On 8th August 1970, a calm, cloudy afternoon, there was only one gull to be seen in the harbour and that was too far away for specific identification. The consequence of the absence of gulls was that the scavenging in the fishing harbour was undertaken by many Grey Herons Ardea cinerea and twice as many Little Egrets Egretta gargetta working individually. Their technique was to fly slowly at about 10 m above the water and when they saw a manageable item to hover with dangling legs, arched neck and bill pointing straight down. They would slowly lose height until they were able to pick up the item when they would rise clumsily and swallow it. Little Egrets would sometimes come down to an item which was too big to manage but having ascertained this would waste no further time on it. Inbetweenwhiles some birds would perch on ships or buoys, but their principal resting place was the ridge of the roof of the nearby Banco de Angola, whose red tiles were largely whitened with their droppings. The regular absence of gulls permitted the inefficient herons to make an easy living by scavenging fish and offal in the fishing harbour. Lowe (The Heron, 1954: 60) gives two records of single Grey Herons scavenging floating fish, and a few records of hovering, but not in connection with scavenging. Worth (Bokmakierie 12 (2), 1961: 32) noted the two species of heron scavenging in the harbour in June 1960, together with Grey-headed Gulls Larus cirrocephalus. It appears that it is only the seasonal absence of gulls that is necessary to permit the Grey Heron and the Little Egret to learn to scavenge.

Some undescribed nests and eggs of New Guinea Birds by C. B. Frith

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Whilst looking at some nests and eggs in the British Museum collections at Tring, Hertfordshire, a number of undescribed nests from New Guinea came to my notice. Upon further investigation in the British Museum collections in London, a number of egg clutches were found to have been collected with some of the nests in Tring. The nests and eggs of the following species are described here, as Rand & Gilliard (1967) make no mention of them, except *Ifrita*. Except for *Eupetes* castanotus, no parent birds were collected with these specimens and the identification, to species, is from original labels only. Identification to subspecies is by the given locality save *Eupetes*, which is identifiable from the head of the parent bird, and *Pachycephala*, which was named as such by the collector.

The names and order used are those of Rand & Gilliard (op. cit.).

Eupetes castanotus par, Mid-mountain Eupetes (Timaliidae)

Sattleburg, Huon Peninsula, S.E. New Guinea. No date or collector's name is given. The head of a parent bird was collected with this nest and egg, and bears the same registration number as the nest.

Although the nest (reg. no. N193.392) is in very poor condition, it was apparently a fairly shallow open cup, composed almost entirely of old leaves and leaf skeletons. All of these leaves are of a broad oval type, the largest of which measures 125×52 mm. There are a few small twiglets and leaf stems in the main structure and a sparse, thin, lining of very fine tendril-like rootlets.

The lack of self-support in this structure suggests that, like *Enpetes leucostictus*, this bird nests on the ground, possibly at the base of a tree. I can give no general measurements for this nest due to its deterioration. Egg 28.3 \times 21.9 mm (Cl. no. 1941.9.4.1780), glossy, unlike that of *E. leucostictus*, being very light pinkish buff with a broad zone of darker russet and grey spots and blotches around the larger end. The russet and grey markings cover the rest of the egg but are less dense and sparser towards the small end.

An additional two clutches labelled as being of this species are preserved in the British Museum collection. The first of these consists of two eggs (Cl. no. 1926.1.26.1–2.) collected by W. Goodfellow at Deva Deva, Wharton Range, near Mafula, S.E. New Guinea, c. 5,000 feet, on 22nd June 1925, and is of the race *E. c. pulcher*. The eggs measure 29.1 \times 22.4 and 29.4 \times 22.6 mm, and are similar to the one of *E. c. par*, but are slightly darker in ground colour, and the markings are regular, not concentrated about the larger end. The grey markings are also inclined to be elongated in this clutch.

The last clutch consists of a single egg (Cl. no. 1901.7.4.16.) collected at Aroa River, S.E. New Guinea by Herr Weiske. It measures 28.7×22.0 mm, and is very similar to the first egg described above but has slightly sparser though larger blotches and spots, and a slightly less dense zone at the large end. This is also of the race *E. c. pulcher*.

Ifrita k. kowaldi, Blue-capped Babbler (Timaliidae)

A nest and egg were collected on the Rawlinson Mountains, Huon Peninsula, Papua during September 1911 by Dr. C. Keysser.

Rand & Gilliard quote the following from L. W. Tho regarding the nest of this species:—"Twelve feet up in a slender sapling, a 'circular cup' (a domed nest?) bulky and heavily decorated with moss". The nest I have before me (reg. no. N193.456) is not in fact domed (as Rand & Gilliard queried) and fits this general description quite well. It is a deep, bulky, thick walled cup-shaped nest built externally almost entirely of green moss and some leaf-fern. A few very fine rootlets and twigs are also apparent. The lining is of fine hair-like brown tendrils, or rootlets, which form a smooth and strong interior to the cup. The external measurements are 101.5 mm in depth and 100.4 mm in diameter. The single egg (Cl. no. 1941.9.4. 1704) is white, very slightly glossy and very sparsely spotted with clear black and purple-black spots and blotches, which are larger and more dense at the larger end. It measures 25.8×20.7 mm.

Pachycephala hyperythra reichenowi, Rufous breasted Whistler (Pachycephalidae) A nest and two eggs were collected at Sattelberg, Huon Peninsula, New Guinea by Wahnes during November 1909.

The nest (reg. no. N193.458) is a bowl-shaped structure measuring 66.8 mm deep and 100.1 mm in diameter externally. The inside cup measures 41.0 deep and 58.8 mm in diameter. It consists very largely of small-leaved climbing ferns, some pieces of which are quite long. There are also some odd tendrils and pieces of moss. The cup is lined with pieces of dried leaves very sparsely covered with hair-like rootlets, possibly from some form of fern. The structure as a whole is fairly compact and quite light.

The eggs (Cl. no. 1941.9.4.1043. collector's no. 48) are a vinous buff, and are blotched and spotted with dark brown and dark grey. Like the eggs of *Pachycephala soror* (see Harrison & Frith 1970), the markings are concentrated in a broad band around the larger end with a few odd dark brown markings elsewhere. They measure 23.9×17.4 and 24.2×17.9 mm, but both are slightly cracked.

Another clutch of two eggs (Cl. no. 1941.9.4.1043, collector's no. 49), which were collected at the same locality as the above, but without accompanying nest, measure 22.4×16.9 and 22.3×17.3 mm. These are very similar to those described above but are slightly lighter in ground colour.

Astrapia rothschildi, Huon Astrapia (Paradisaeidae)

There are two nests of this species in the collections. They are very similar to each other in construction and shape but very different in size. Both were collected by C. Keysser from "Inland of Huon Gulf, S.E. New Guinea".

The smaller nest (reg. no. N193.255) has no date of collection. It is a firm shallow cup built mostly of vines, rootlets and creepers built onto a conspicuous foundation of large strong broad leaves and leaf pieces, leaf skeletons and pieces of moss. There are also additional odd pieces of moss on the outside of the structure, mostly on the rim. It is 154.2 mm in external diameter and 81.6 mm in depth. Internally the cup measures 94.9 mm in diameter and 39.8 mm in depth.

The larger nest (reg. no. N193.254) is very similar with perhaps a little less moss in evidence and also has some fine hair-like rootlets for lining. It measures externally 203.8 mm in diameter and 73.7 mm in depth.

Paradisaea guilielmi, Emperor of Germany's Bird of Paradise (Paradisaeidae)

A nest was collected by C. Keysser from "Inland of Huon Gulf, S.E. New Guinea.", but no date is given. It is a fairly firm deep cup measuring externally 94.1 mm deep and 148.0 mm in diameter. Internally it is 71.5 mm deep and 82.9 mm in diameter. As in the last species this structure is built on a firm foundation of large broad leaves. It is mostly constructed of creeper tendrils and vines which on average measure c. 1.6 mm in thickness, the heaviest piece being 2.8 mm thick and c. 263 mm in length. A few of these larger lengths of vine are beneath the leaf foundation, lending support to it. One of the creeper-like tendrils around the rim of the nest bears a number of fairly large oval leaves measuring c. 62.1×25.4 mm. Possibly this is used

as some form of decoration. There is a thick and firm lining to the cup, consisting of very fine tendrils.

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Geographical variation and relationships in *Apalis* chirindensis Shelley and *Apalis melanocephala* (Fischer and Reichenow) in Rhodesia and southern Moçambique

by Michael P. Stuart Irwin & H. D. Jackson

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Introduction

Apalis chirindensis Shelley was almost always regarded as a monotypic species until Vincent (1949: 151-152) attached it as a race to the more wide-spread *Apalis melanocephala* (Fischer & Reichenow), a decision regarded as doubtful by Irwin (1963: 24). It was reinstated to full specific status by Clancey (1968a: 141) who pointed out that in several respects it is a relatively distinct species.

One of the diagnostic characters used by Clancey (*loc. cit.*) to separate *chirindensis* from *melanocephala* is the colour of the bill, normally wholly black in *Apalis* but pale in *chirindensis*. Recent work has, however, shown that this character is a geographically variable one, so we propose in this paper to re-examine the relationship of *chirindensis* to *melanocephala*.

Additional material recently collected enables us to further clarify the distribution and geographical variation of each form; this includes an isolated population of *chirindensis* discovered by M.P.S.I. on Gorongosa Mountain in Moçambique.

We conclude that *chirindensis* is a good species, more closely related to *melanocephala* than to anything else.

Distribution of Apalis chirindensis

Apalis chirindensis is found principally in the canopy of montane evergreen forest, and has a rather limited distribution in eastern Rhodesia and adjacent Moçambique, with an isolated population on Gorongosa Mountain. Following the closed forest formation classification of Wild & Fernandes (1967), chirindensis can be shown to occur primarily in type (7), i.e. moist broad leaved montane forest, which is widespread above 1,700 m; and to a lesser extent in type (1), i.e. moist evergreen forest at low and medium altitudes. Such forests occur along the mountain chain forming the frontier zone between Rhodesia and Moçambique, over a distance of some 300 km from the Inyanga Highlands at 17°50'S., to the Chirinda Forest of Mount Selinda at 20°25'S. And an isolated block of type (7) occurs above 1,200 m on Gorongosa Mountain, some 105 km to the east of the Inyanga Highlands; the intervening terrain of the Manica Platform is dominated by Miombo woodland which is ecologically unsuitable for chirindensis. A. chirindensis is restricted in its distribution to these two areas, and so qualifies as one of the "rare birds of Africa" as defined by Hall & Moreau (1962).